

## CRITICAL NOTICE

### **Fat Wednesday**

*Wittgenstein on Aspects*

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John Verdi's new book derives its title from a specific passage in *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, xi, 216 (Blackwell, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd edition 1958). This passage comes towards the end of a sequence forming the first part of xi from page 193 onwards, in which the reader is introduced to 'aspect seeing', 'the dawning of an aspect' and, amongst other things, to a connection between 'seeing an aspect' and 'experiencing the meaning of a word' (214). For a very particular reason, the passage itself is worth quoting in full:

Given the two ideas 'fat' and 'lean', would you be rather inclined to say that Wednesday was fat and Tuesday lean, or vice versa? (I incline decisively towards the former.) Now have "fat" and "lean" some different meaning here from their usual one?—They have a different use.—So ought I really to have used different words? Certainly not that.—I want to use these words (with their familiar meanings) here.—Now, I say nothing about the causes of this phenomenon. They might be associations from my childhood. But that is a hypothesis. Whatever the explanation,—the inclination is there.

Asked "What do you really mean here by 'fat' and 'lean'?"—I could only explain the meanings in the usual way. I could not point to the examples of Tuesday and Wednesday. Here one might speak of a 'primary' and 'secondary' sense of a word. It is only if the word has the primary sense for you that you use it in the secondary one.

Only if you have learnt to calculate—on paper or out loud—can you be made to grasp, by means of this concept, what calculating in the head is.

The secondary sense is not a 'metaphorical' sense. If I say "For me the vowel e

is yellow" I do not mean: 'yellow' in a metaphorical sense,—for I could not express what I want to say in any other way than by means of the idea 'yellow'.

The most significant feature of this account is that the connections drawn between the ideas of 'fat' and 'lean' and the days of the week, and between the vowel 'e' and the colour yellow are far from being connections that everyone might be inclined to draw. For a fair proportion of the population, they may have little or no significance. This is not unconnected to the reference Wittgenstein has already made to aspect blindness as something *akin* to the lack of a 'musical ear' (214). In a similar way, some experts say that the condition of dyslexia affects in varying degrees between 10% and 20% of the populace. This provides a good reason for saying that it is in the nature of the example of 'fat Wednesday' that it will not necessarily be significant to everyone.

On the other hand, this would not seem to be true of the notion of *experiencing* the meaning of a word - 'March!', for example, as either the name of a month or as an instruction to stride forward in a particular fashion (215) - which would normally be agreed to have a much wider significance, just as the classic examples of the Duck-Rabbit and the Necker Cube would seem to be universally recognisable *as* pictures which are open to more than one interpretation. When considering the Duck-Rabbit in a philosophical context, we do not normally consider it possible that a person may be unable *in principle* to see the figure *as* one which can shift its *aspect* from duck to rabbit as it is viewed. The connection between this and Wittgenstein's reference to calculating in the head as something which owes its sense to *already* having learnt to calculate on paper or out loud, is itself not immediately clear. On the face of it, this may appear to be no more than the expression of an independent methodological principle aimed at undermining the cogency of Augustine's child in Part 1 (§ 1) as someone who can *think* only not yet *speak* (Cf. § 32).

In fact, Wittgenstein asks how pronouncing a word whilst reading with expression can completely fill the word with meaning, when the meaning of a word lies in its *use* (215), a question which follows his earlier one (214) concerning what a person would lack if he did *not* experience the *meaning* of a word, as one can be said to *mean* 'march' or 'bank' in different ways. Not only are

these unusual questions, but it is not at first sight very clear just what philosophical significance they may be said to have. It is John Verdi's aim to throw some light on these and related issues. Yet the extent to which he is going to be regarded as successful in fulfilling his aims will itself be dependent on the reader's own prior interpretation of what Wittgenstein in these later passages is really about. However, because Verdi freely states in his Preface (*Ibid.*, x) that the book is intended primarily for lay readers and not for professional philosophers, so that he has already decided not to engage with the secondary literature to any significant degree, the overall philosophical relevance of much of his psychological discussion with its associated examples can sometimes appear to be hanging in the balance. This is inevitably going to throw doubt on the extent to which '*Fat Wednesday* can also serve to introduce a reader who is not familiar with Wittgenstein to the breadth and depth of his understanding of how language works' (*Ibid.*), and so in the final analysis on the extent to which Verdi's discussion may be said to 'illuminate psychology, aesthetics and religious belief'.

The first chapter on *The Aspects Family* contains a detailed discussion of familiar examples like the Duck-Rabbit, The Necker Cube, the contemplation of a human face and the sudden *noticing* of a resemblance between it and another, together with an account of some illusions: the Muller-Lyer, one from Jastrow, the Ponzo and Kanizsa's Triangle. A final example which, we are told, first appeared in the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1954 (*Ibid.*, 20 and Endnote 16, 270), is a puzzle-picture which is said to contain a 'hidden' representation of a bearded Mediaeval Christ-like face, one which most people, even if usually only after a period of time, suddenly recognise *as* the face of a human being. According to Verdi, the picture acquires *meaning* only on recognising the face, whereas previously it had been no more than a jumble of meaningless patches of black. In this case, to be asked to draw what one saw *before* the revelation and *after* would surely be to draw quite different pictures, yet a paradox resides in the fact that the puzzle picture *per se* remains unaltered no matter whether one *sees* the face in it or not. Verdi suggests in bringing this first chapter of 20 pages or so to a close, that he may now have reached an impasse in understanding what is going on.

As Verdi sees it, the second chapter on *Aspects and Words* is an exploration of how the seeing

of aspects in Wittgenstein is dependent on the ability to speak a language (*Ibid.*, x). It begins by asking in effect what unifies the many different kinds of examples which come under the heading of aspect-seeing, and answers in general terms that when being suddenly struck by a change of aspect, the viewer is indulging in a form of action in which he has become absorbed. In the course of elaborating on this point, Verdi introduces the idea of *introspection* and the notion of *qualia* as it figures in the debate about physicalism - including the example of Mary the brilliant colour scientist *pace* Jackson 1986 - the point of this introduction being to illustrate a possible comparison between the dawning of an aspect as a private and non-physical event, and Mary's recognition of what it is *really* like to be acquainted with the colour red. This issue is not as important as it seems, however, because the extent to which qualia can be said to be known only to the person who has experience of them - *viz.*, that a person is free if he so wishes to keep his acquaintance with them to himself - is knowledge expressible in a public language. That what may be at stake here is an issue about some kind of radical privacy of the kind that Wittgenstein is said to denounce in his 'private language argument', does not really arise. This question of privacy will recur later on.

In opposition to *introspection*, Verdi next considers *experiment* and the possibility that the causes of psychological states and events including the dawning of an aspect, may be hidden neural and therefore unconscious processes. A rather detailed discussion of various experiments and results in this scientific field concludes by claiming, with Wittgenstein, that the problems which trouble the philosopher about aspect-seeing are not answered by providing causal explanations, because the philosophical difficulties are purely conceptual. Anyone already familiar with the work of Wittgenstein will regard this as a foregone conclusion, but here one must remember that what at times seems a rather prolonged discussion with little philosophical import, is intended to be of benefit primarily to what Verdi has already described as his intended lay reader.

The following section B on 'How We Do Things with Words' has already been described by Verdi in his Preface as perhaps the most difficult part of the book, but one which, as he puts it,

the reader is recommended not to skip because most of what follows it will fail to make much sense without a grasp of its import. His main point concerning this section is presented as follows:

Wittgenstein urges us to think of the meaning of a word or a sentence as its use and to think of words and sentences as tools with which we can do things. Their primary purpose may not be to describe or name, though they can have this use, too.....I contend that our ability to use words enables us to see aspects. In the following section of chapter two, I explain this connection between seeing and saying, and how it arises from Wittgenstein's conception of the workings of ordinary language (*Ibid.*, xi).

Whilst most readers will not regard this as controversial, they will equally see it as requiring more clarification. The section referred to turns out, in fact, to be little more than an elementary exposition of the content of the *Philosophical Investigations*, up to and including the passages relating to private language, an exposition that regards Augustine as the exponent of the 'belief that every word has a meaning that is correlated with it. The meaning is the object for which the word stands, or an idea which is connected by the word to the object' (*Ibid.*, 43). Quoting in full both Augustine's description of how he came to learn a language, and the tale of the shopkeeper, Verdi reaches the familiar conclusion that 'these three simple words, "apple", "red", "five", begin to illuminate how words function in various ways' (*Ibid.*, 44).

The section continues with a consideration of words as instruments characterised by their use, like the tools in a tool-box, and with a discussion, quoting § 23, of the notion of *language-games*, followed by the idea of *family resemblance* as it arises in connection with § 65. Verdi goes on to mention the notion of *following a rule* and its connection with the passage on *reading* (§ 156). He draws the moral that the difference between reading and not reading lies not in the occurrence or non-occurrence of conscious or unconscious mental processes but in 'the circumstances that make it correct in the one case to say of someone that he or she is reading' (*Ibid.*, 53). Quoting Baker &

Hacker, the relation between a rule and what counts as following it is given by how we employ it, how we would explain or justify our use of it, and by how we would teach it, learn how to apply it and correct misapplications of it.

Verdi introduces the sections on private language primarily by raising the question how, if our experiences of changes of aspect are, as they surely are, private, Wittgenstein accounts for private experiences of this kind within the context of his discussion and rejection of the idea of a private language. Whilst the obvious answer to this is that we use a public language to talk about our private experiences, he decides to elaborate on this not very startling conclusion by surmising that the mistake committed by the private linguist is that he cannot refer to a private sensation by using a private language because, ultimately, he cannot be in error in his future use of his introduced signs, so that in the final analysis his language cannot be governed by rules. Whilst his treatment of private language is rather perfunctory, Verdi adds the conclusion that *private language is impossible* to the notions of *meaning as use*, *family resemblance*, and *language as taught and learnt*, because in his view these slogan-like phrases jointly serve to illuminate Wittgenstein's treatment of language, and so hopefully his treatment and understanding of what it is to see something under an aspect.

The remainder of the chapter in section C 'How We See Things with Words' proves to be another rather prolonged treatment of aspects, peppered with examples, the aim of which is to show 'why the work of psychologists on seeing ambiguous figures, faces and puzzle-pictures fails to address an issue critical to Wittgenstein: the place of seeing aspects in our *conceptual world*' (*Ibid.*, 66). Verdi illustrates his idea in describing two aspects of the Necker Cube:

The descriptions are themselves part of the visual experiences: one object, two descriptions, two visual experiences. "The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique" (*PI*, p. 208). In this case the technique is language, and it allows for alternative descriptions of what I see. The descriptions are in a sense brought to bear on what

I see, providing me with a new experience, *creating* a new experience

(*Ibid.*, 83).

Utilising Wittgenstein's claim that 'it is only if someone *can do*, has learnt, is master of such-and-such, that it makes sense to say he has had *this* experience (*Investigations*, Part II, xi, 209), Verdi draws the conclusion that 'how language is taught and learned is at the root of our seeing aspects and experiencing changes of aspect' (*Ibid.*). Echoing a recent treatment of these questions by William Child (1), he interestingly draws a distinction in the noticing of aspects between *experiencing* or *seeing* something as the involuntary element in this exercise, and *thinking* or *judging that* as the voluntary element:

My expression of a change of aspect is the expression of seeing something, in fact, *seeing* it *as*. The *seeing* is the involuntary part, the *as* is the voluntary part that engages the imagination or thought: "Hence the flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought" (*PI*, sec. 168) [sic.] (*Ibid.* - N.B. the actual reference in Verdi's stated edition is *Investigations*, Part II, xi, 197).

Verdi continues by claiming that Wittgenstein distinguishes between a change in aspect and the continuous seeing of an aspect by someone who does not notice any alternative interpretation of what he is seeing (a fairly obvious distinction that he detects in '*PI*, sec.166', another puzzling reference which should be *Investigations*, Part II, xi, 194 *et seq.*). A great deal of the discussion of aspects in this section does not call for comment insofar as it constitutes little more than a recounting of Wittgenstein's remarks, although there is a particular feature of his treatment that demands attention because it arises on two specific occasions within the chapter as a whole. On page 56, Verdi quotes vintage Baker and Hacker on *grasping the rule* as manifesting a technique of application revealed in action, so that the phenomenon of language as envisaged by them is part of the web of human behaviour requiring certain regularities, to be found in the physical world and in human nature. The notion of language as *praxis*, set against this stable and

regular framework in which understanding is not a mental state but a capacity, is said to be a fundamental feature of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Verdi at this point offers a supposed objection to this point of view on the grounds that our *private* experiences of aspect changes, because private, cannot be captured in a public language, an objection that Wittgenstein shows to be impotent *via* the 'private language argument'.

Consequently, how a *public* language is acquired is, from a point of view identifiable in Baker & Hacker, a wholly separate matter. Yet that Verdi has really had in mind all along the distinct question *not* that aspect change is *private* in some radical sense, but that it may be noticeable in the absence of having acquired any kind of language at all, becomes clearer on page 89, when he suggests on behalf of a supposed objector that all the aspect changes he has been discussing 'may boil down to images in the mind rather than the surreptitious imposition of words and their meanings':

Many psychologists studying these phenomena talk about 'representations' and 'processes.' Why should we not say that their accounts in the end are more understandable, more believable than Wittgenstein's account, and besides have the weight of experiment on their side? In addition, your suggestion that the seeing of aspects is at root a linguistic event and that aspect changes exist only for beings with language seems like a testable, empirical claim, not a bit of conceptual analysis alone (*Ibid.*).

Verdi's answer to this objection is what he regards as a *conceptual* one: although Wittgenstein does not deny that we have mental images or that we can 'see things in our mind's eye', the ability to imagine something does not consist in the contemplation of a mental image; although of course a mental image can be said to *accompany* whatever it is that one may be taken to be imagining. The imagining is in *this* respect essentially a linguistic activity, and that for Verdi is a conceptual matter. Given that it is, the idea that we might have, *prior to* learning a language, *meaningful* mental images of some kind, can therefore be taken to play *no* viable role in our understanding of aspects, or indeed in our coming to use a public language at all.

It is doubtful, however, whether this argument would cut any ice with those who are prone to believe that Augustine's child is someone who is already acquainted with a world of items of different *kinds*, which he merely requires to *label* or *name* in the course of 'inventing for himself' or 'being taught' a language. On their view, it can be no objection to this viewpoint merely to argue that imagining something does not consist in having a mental image. Indeed, the virtue of this position on their view would be that we very often do in practice come across new items of particular kinds in our experience which we can then go on to name, label or classify in a perfectly normal way, so that our ability to *imagine* cases of this kind does count very much in favour of an 'Augustinian' point of view. Surely, they would argue, the prevalence of so many variations on this general way of thinking in the history of philosophy, is a testament to its staying power: rather than locate the 'emergence' of meaning within the linguistic practices of groups of human beings who share basic reactions and reactive attitudes within a stable framework, the tendency has always existed to see *meaning* as something *already* embedded in human perception or in the 'consciousness' of human beings who encounter a world into which they are born armed with the conceptual resources that they require.

But Wittgenstein's questioning of the so-called 'Augustinian picture' in *this* respect was never intended to be based on a *conceptual* point of the kind that Verdi discovers in the claim that to imagine something does not consist in having a mental image. It is instead a fundamental feature of his methodology to provide the circumstances in which we do *in fact* learn a language as a *reminder* of our ignorance when we come to entertain the kind of *picture* that Augustine's child is commonly taken to embody. The picture is in an important sense *empty*, insofar as it can be said to avoid offering a genuine answer to the questions that from the beginning have puzzled him, *viz.*, what it is for a word to have meaning and how it can come to have meaning. But on his assessment this implies *only* that the temptation to think in a certain way is not easy to resist. This would explain why for him the tendency to see meaning as in some sense lodged in the human mind at birth, or even, more recently, in the structure of the human brain, has assumed such historical importance. Wittgenstein, however,

does not provide an *argument* to show that on his view this tendency is wholly misguided. We are, rather, free to adopt this picture should we wish. His main point is only that we ought to be aware of the nature of the temptations that underlie our tendency to use it.

Consequently, although Verdi from this point of view mislocates Wittgenstein's objections to the 'meaning without language' picture, failing indeed to draw a distinction between it and the reasons for making the *conceptual* point that imagining does not consist in having a mental picture of what one imagines, he is surely correct in his contention that the role of language - at least insofar as we think of these questions in relation to human beings - is fundamental to the treatment of aspect-seeing that Wittgenstein provides. Verdi ends his chapter with a general summing-up of the points he has been discussing, although one passage requires evaluation:

When the Necker cube flips, I *see* the new orientation. No word describes it better. You say: "But can't my experiences transcend my ability to talk about and describe them? The lesson of seeing aspects is not that language is the hinge on which changes of aspect swing, but rather that language cannot reach to all my experiences, many of which precede or elude it both descriptively and logically. How is one to define a feeling? It is something special and indefinable. One can only recognise it within oneself." Yes, something about that sounds right, but "it must be possible to teach the use of words!"  
(*LWPP I*, 394) (*Ibid.*, 107).

But on Verdi's assessment of the priority he believes that Wittgenstein gives to language, what is being quoted here can hardly be thought to sound right at all. He concludes with the claim that 'the very general fact of nature that we teach and learn language as we do provides the sort of unity to our possible experiences and expressions we might have feared is lacking' (*Ibid.*) *Aspect blindness*, the topic of his next chapter, is then introduced as something in which there is a real division between people and their experiences.

Verdi chooses three examples of aspect blindness from the psychological literature in order to illustrate that those people who suffer from this 'condition' have particular experiences closed to them because they cannot do certain things with words (*Ibid.*, 124). His most prominent example is the rather well-known case provided by Doctor Oliver Sacks in *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* (Simon & Schuster, 1987). As Verdi presents this case, the individual who suffers from the unusual, not to say bizarre condition in question cannot see the *gestalt* of a scene because he cannot recognise organised wholes. He loses the ability to see aspects and therefore cannot make sense, for example, of a representational painting, just as he cannot recognise a human face for what it is. Verdi also considers certain types of aphasia, and autistic spectrum disorder in which a certain inability to spontaneously perceive aspect changes, like the Duck-Rabbit, correlates with a lack of success in theory-of-mind tasks. He finds that 'a single cognitive ability' may serve to explain this lack in psychological terms. Generally speaking, Verdi believes that our understanding of these kinds of cases can be deepened by looking at what Wittgenstein has to say about experiencing the meaning of a word. At this point, he presents the difficulties he is encountering as follows:

I seem to have my hands full. Not only do I need to address Wittgenstein's own question about what someone who didn't have these 'experiences of meaning' would be missing. I must also try to get clearer about the importance of 'experiencing the meaning of a word.' I faced a similar challenge when I tried to explain the concept of experiencing a change of aspect. How are the two kinds of experience related? Would I be justified in calling those who fail to experience the meaning of a word 'meaning-blind'? (*Ibid.*, 137).

The section of the third chapter entitled *Fat Wednesday* is in effect an attempt to explore these themes, and Verdi arrives at the reasonable conclusion that experiencing the meaning of a word like 'bank' or experiencing its loss of meaning, say by repeating it incessantly, are incidental to the

primary sense of 'meaning as use' that occupies Wittgenstein. In much the same way, he draws the moral that a word that has lost its meaning for him may still retain its meaning for a listener. The actual context he refers to in making this claim is Wittgenstein's reference to Mr Scot who is not a Scot, where the first occurrence of 'Scot' is a proper name and the second is a common name. (Verdi sees this in 'PI, sec. 150' (*Ibid.*, 143), when, puzzlingly, the actual reference is *Investigations*, Part II, ix, 176). Wittgenstein attempts to reverse the order of proper name and common name here in order to show that in their ordinary uses, there is no parading of the *meanings* of these words 'before his mind'. Yet when he tries to *mean* the first occurrence of the name as a common name and the second as a proper name he finds that the sense disintegrates even although the sentence will retain its sense for a listener, as Verdi confirms, *via* its original meaning.

Whilst this seems alright, it neglects the fact that we ordinarily invent names for people based on their characteristics, so that I can say 'Here comes Mrs. Nosy' in referring to someone who is generally over-inquisitive, or 'There's Lord Snooty' when talking of a person who is haughty, unapproachable and rather snobbish. Applied to the *Scot* example, it would therefore be quite acceptable to say that Mr Scot is not a Scot where this had the implication that someone of Scottish descent was not in fact a member of the Scot family, in which case Wittgenstein's disintegration of meaning would simply not occur in the way that he suggests. It would equally be alright to say of someone that 'he's certainly no Wittgenstein' as a way of talking, not about his family background, but about his evident lack of philosophical ability.

As it turns out, the actual example of 'fat Wednesday' occupies Verdi only to a limited extent in this section. He correctly points out that whilst there are indeed metaphorical applications for the terms 'fat' and 'lean', this is a quite unusual application of these words which for some may even 'sound silly' (*Ibid.*, 151) because 'fat' and 'lean' retain their normal meanings. The remainder of the chapter does not contain much worth commenting on prior to Verdi's exploration in his next chapter of *Aspects and Art*. If there is one feature of his account of aspect-blindness which stands out, it is the *picture* of the relationship between mind and brain that would appear to be fostered

by the kinds of clinical discoveries he has earlier discussed: these replace the image of the human psyche as a seamless whole, one which we normally, and quite unthinkingly entertain, with a quite unfamiliar prospect in which discrete neural mechanisms are shown to be causally responsible for the operation of those individual components into which normal human mental capacities would appear to be capable of being broken down. Yet without the discovery of these particular forms of brain malfunction, this idea would not normally enter our thinking because this explanatory picture is out of step with our understanding of ourselves. Nevertheless, in the scientific field, there will always remain the abstract possibility that certain particular mental functions may be capable of being realised by quite different mechanisms.

The long chapter of 70 pages or so on *Aspects and Art* is, frankly, difficult to assess, because it so often reads like a straightforward account of how critics approach and evaluate works of art and music - even at one point venturing into the 'art' of winetasting (Section D *Emergent Meaning and Wine, Ibid.*, 195) - without its being at all clear what philosophical significance the discussion has within the context of the book as a whole. The chapter contains well-produced colour plates of four famous paintings, Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew*, Jan Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*, William Hogarth's *Mrs. Salter*, and Gustav Klimt's *Adele Bloch-Bauer*. There are also monochrome reproductions of works by Antoine Watteau, Brice Marden, Pablo Picasso and Frans Hals. *The Last Supper* is represented in four different versions by Leonardo da Vinci, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Pieter Soutman after Rubens, and in a sketch, called an adaptation by Verdi, of Leonardo's painting by Rembrandt. There are also some quotations from musical scores by Mozart and Webern.

Taking Verdi's treatment of the Vermeer painting as an example, he advises that because this work is overtly allegorical, it requires interpretation, which it receives *via* quotations from art historian Arthur Wheelock: these help Verdi to grasp the moods and thoughts of the woman in the picture who is holding a balance. With this new insight into the painting provided by the critic, Verdi advises that he has been brought to interpret the expression on the face of the woman

in a quite different way from before, so that he is *seeing* something new in the picture even although there is a clear sense in which nothing in the picture *per se* has changed; and this is at the heart of his understanding of *seeing aspects*. Strictly speaking, the Vermeer painting is on Verdi's assessment only an intermediate case of his primary Duck-Rabbit example of seeing aspects, because he claims that he *interprets* certain features of the Vermeer painting differently in the light of his acquired knowledge, without its being true that these features alter how they *look* to him. On the other hand, he suggests that when he looks at the woman's *face* and considers its expression, he is not actually *interpreting* what he is seeing, although what he sees is affected by his interpretation of other things. That we do not *need* to interpret a face in the course of ordinary life, seen in the light of the Sacks and aphasia examples, 'ought to strike us as marvelous' (*Ibid.*, 176).

If this is bound to evoke our puzzlement, the reason is clearly that if we are going to extend the notion of *seeing aspects* to cases where we come as a result of increased knowledge, to entertain new ways of looking at things, of seeing the world in a new light, then we will find ourselves using it to talk of just about anything we please. But it then becomes so far removed from the specific *kinds* of cases which Wittgenstein originally uses it to describe that it begins to lose what philosophical significance it may be thought to possess. It is difficult to see how Verdi's general approach can avoid this danger:

Still, I think that for the most part we appreciate that coming to see a work of art requires that we attend to *small* things that can have big implications. We do this every day when we immediately recognize a change in mood or opinion on the face of a friend....We do it with people, and we do it with paintings, with music, with words. If art is to mean to us more than simply 'beauty', pleasant sounds and 'interesting' pictures, we must pay attention and learn to see and hear with more receptivity the aspects that works of art show us (*Ibid.*, 227).

The final chapter *Ethics and Aesthetics Are One* is used by Verdi to extend his treatment

of seeing aspects 'to the areas of science, ethics, and religion' (*Ibid.*, 230). It begins by reiterating his earlier point that 'our ability to see aspects has its source, not in our eyes or brain, but in language' (*Ibid.*, 229), because the nature of the shift that is fundamental to our understanding of what it is to see an aspect cannot be discovered by studying retinas or brain scans. It is only in the final analysis by what a person goes on to say or do that he can correctly be judged to have seen something under different aspects. Verdi does not mention that this is equally true of circumstances in which we might be willing to apply this notion of *seeing something under an aspect* to animals who in an obvious sense do not possess language, for in this case we would apply it by analogy based on how we apply it to ourselves. At an earlier point in the book (page 89), Verdi is in danger of almost seeming to deny this point, as if the principle that seeing an aspect is at root a linguistic event somehow implies that it can have no application to animals at all. But this would be to mislocate the role played by the idea of *possessing a language*, since we understand and explain animal behaviour in the absence of the possession of language by animals, only by analogy with how we understand our own.

The first section of the chapter, *A. Science*, continues the way of looking at aspects that Verdi has already used in his discussion of art. Before Galileo, for example, people saw the Moon *as* smooth, and *as* covered with dark and light patches, whereas today it is now seen *as* peppered with craters. According to Verdi, something has changed, 'but if so it is in the way that the puzzle-picture of the man who looks something like Jesus changes when it suddenly becomes a portrait' (*Ibid.*, 232). But in saying this he is surely being more than a little disingenuous, because it would be true to say that prior to the invention of the telescope the opportunity to see the Moon *as* covered with the 'depressions and cavities' to which he refers was not even available, in which case the notion that we could experience a shift from one aspect to another could have had no application. Indeed, to portray the Moon as viewed from the Earth without the aid of a telescope as one aspect, and its appearance with the aid of a telescope or from an orbiting spacecraft as an opposing aspect, is clearly to misuse the concept of *seeing under an aspect* that Wittgenstein employs.

In more general terms, to use examples in which our increased knowledge of the universe is allowed to provide us with new 'aspects' of the phenomena under investigation, whilst from one perspective no more than an innocent form of expression, is highly misleading if it is intended to throw light on aspect-seeing as Wittgenstein presents it. Yet Verdi expands his discussion by going on to inform us that 'Galileo's and Newton's observational aspect-changes lead to what Thomas Kuhn...calls a paradigm shift' (*Ibid.*, 238), and 'Paradigm shifts are much like aspect changes' (*Ibid.*, 239).

But even this later suggestion, which at first sight may look more fruitful, really fails to conform to the picture of *seeing under an aspect* that Wittgenstein presents. Verdi argues that Kuhn's paradigm shifts 'are more like recognising what one did not recognise before, such as the portrait in the puzzle-picture' (*Ibid.*), and this leads him to the conclusion that Copernicus in overthrowing the Ptolemaic system of epicycles, did not *discover* that the Earth moved round the Sun. On the contrary, Verdi presents him as suddenly seeing things under a new *aspect* in conformance with Wittgenstein's use of the concept. But the Christ-like face of the puzzle-picture enjoys a role which makes it readily accessible to *anyone* who is capable of seeing the patchwork canvas under *this* aspect, whereas the explanatory role of the Copernican system is not in the same sense readily accessible to anyone familiar with the same observational data as Ptolemy. On the contrary, it requires a *paradigm shift* in our thinking to reach the point at which the relative simplicity of this new model can be *seen as* a picture having a suitable explanatory role, even if, on observational grounds, it required to be amended later on. In this respect, it cannot be said to be *already* there for anyone to see. For this reason, although his use of the Kuhnian paradigm as a means of discovering 'some connections between science and aesthetics' may appear to be a rather brave example to use, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he is once again stretching Wittgenstein's notion of *seeing under an aspect* to cover cases to which it just does not apply.

The final section *B* of this chapter, *From a Religious Point of View*, first of all discusses Wittgenstein's well-known 1929 *Lecture on Ethics*, and concludes:

‘And I will now describe the experience of wondering at the existence of the world by saying: it is the experience of seeing the world as a miracle’ (*PO*, 43). Seeing the world as full of facts and seeing it as a miracle are two ways of seeing, or the seeing of two aspects of the world. (*Ibid.*, 245).

The world of facts is described by using ordinary propositions and the world as a miracle is described by using ‘nonsensical’ propositions that nevertheless strike us as capturing the appropriate thing to say: ‘some of our deepest experiences seem to *require* nonsense in order to be expressed’ (*Ibid.*) But, once again, this is to see two ‘aspects’ of the world in that wider sense already mentioned that bears little relation to Wittgenstein’s notion of *seeing under an aspect*.

Verdi next points out that in the fields of ethics, religion and aesthetics, we do not take the word of others as a conclusive reason for holding certain beliefs, something which applies equally to humour:

I cannot believe that a joke is funny simply because another tells me it is. If I don’t think it’s funny, I can’t even see what might be funny about it....And of course explaining the joke to me usually won’t help much, because the humor comes from getting it all at once, not from understanding it when it’s explained (*Ibid.*, 247).

But this is just not true: the sudden realisation of the *point* of a joke on having it explained, often results in laughter. The discussion then turns to two examples of individuals who are said to have direct contact with God, Abraham who is told to sacrifice his only son, and the more immediately relevant example of Augustine who, in his *Confessions*, is said to experience an unusually deep and penetrating change of *aspect* in undergoing conversion, so that the world he inhabits ‘will in some sense be entirely different, but it will in another sense be entirely the same’ (*Ibid.*, 250). A similar point is also made in regard to Freudian therapy, which is compared to

Kuhn's paradigm shifts because the patient's cure results from seeing his circumstances in an entirely new light, and so under a wholly different *aspect*.

Once again, whilst this may be true, its relevance to Wittgenstein's notion of *seeing under an aspect* is open to question. Consequently, whilst it may be true that seeing only the scientific *aspect* of the world blinds thinkers like Dawkins, Weinberg and Dennett to the significance of any alternative in which its existence may be seen as *miraculous*, a viewpoint which is not intended to incorporate a denial that causal explanation has its proper place in an entirely different context (*Ibid.*, 253), the reader is left wondering how this relates to the original notion of *seeing under an aspect*. The Wittgensteinian point of view that Verdi is discussing here can be found in *Culture and Value*, 85 (*Ibid.*, 255), where it is said that someone who asks where the world comes from is not looking for a causal explanation. In the same way, someone who asks about the meaning of life is not normally in search of the kinds of results to be found in a manual of organic chemistry.

Verdi's idea of entertaining different perspectives on the world, *e.g.*, the world seen from the point of view of physics or from that of religion, leads him finally to look at the notion of tolerance to be found in the writings of American pragmatists like Pierce, James, Dewey and Rorty, where the aim is to 'keep the conversation going', which involves trying to see the world through others' eyes. Wittgenstein's notion of *aspect-seeing*, on this assessment, has wide ramifications connecting it to the ability to redescribe the familiar in unfamiliar terms, an ability shared by thinkers as diverse as 'Newton and Christ, Freud and Marx' (*Ibid.*, 260). But this, for the reasons given, is once again to use Wittgenstein's idea of *seeing under an aspect* outwith the kinds of contexts in which he originally intended it to have an application.

*Fat Wednesday*, with a main text hovering around 300 pages, is a long book, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that it is considerably longer than it need have been. Even allowing for its intended audience, the work could easily have been condensed in order to avoid the sheer amount of repetition that it contains; and a greater focus in particular areas would have helped to sharpen its overall goals. At times, Verdi investigates his subject in the way that Wittgenstein often does in his notebooks, exploring it time and time again from different directions with little concern for the fact that issues

often appear, by normal standards, to have already been adequately covered and answers, where required, already provided. However, Wittgenstein's notes as we have them, are only rough drafts not intended for publication as they stand: his preferred method was to weed out what he considered to be the less favourable of them before making the best arrangement of those that remained. There is nothing to show that this process need come at some point to an end.

Verdi's book nevertheless covers a lot of interesting ground, and often brings some unusual topics to the foreground, even although the reader can sometimes be left wondering about their strictly philosophical relevance. He also raises a great many questions to which it has been shown that he only on occasion provides satisfactory answers. This, however, is not so important as the fact that in bringing the notion of *seeing under an aspect* to our attention, he does manage to explore in some detail a topic which, in most elementary treatises on Wittgenstein's later work, has seldom been regarded as meriting the time and effort that Verdi believes we ought to invest in exploring its many ramifications. Yet, despite his detailed discussion, whether it really has these ramifications for science, art, and for religious belief, is surely open to question on the strength of the arguments he presents.

## ENDNOTES

(1) *Wittgenstein Routledge Philosophers*, William Child, (Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge 2011).

*As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH and PHILOSOPHIA. His latest, on Wittgenstein, appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, with a further in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010.*